

8 Strategies

8.1 Aboriginal Integration Strategy

This report has identified a number of challenges Saskatoon employers face in recruiting and retaining Aboriginal employees. The survey indicated that 34.9% of employers recruited an Aboriginal employee in the past year. The total number of employees covered by the survey was 45,300, of which 2,378, or 5%, were indicated to be Aboriginal persons. This falls short of the approximate 13% required to have a representative workforce.

The personal interviews and focus groups revealed a high level of concern as well as interest in terms of how to improve existing strategies and what new initiatives may be needed. What became evident in the focus group was the lack of communication and knowledge of best practices and an awareness of Aboriginal culture.

The following reflects the outcomes of the focus groups and interviews in terms of what is required to increase Aboriginal participation in the labour force. Also, common barriers are identified as well as the role industry can play to overcome them.

Attitudes and other barriers to Aboriginal employment exist in the workplaces. The participants cited barriers in the following areas.

8.1.1 Communication

Employers indicated a real concern with the lack of information available to them regarding Aboriginal recruitment and retention.

Communication is lacking on success stories. Also, successful models and companies who can be approached for mentoring and guidance on this issue are not being communicated to Saskatoon employers. Employers expressed concern that they do not know who to approach on issues of best practices.

Furthermore, employers are not sure where to go to recruit Aboriginal employees. They still tend to use traditional mediums to recruit their workers. The survey indicated that, of those companies who hired Aboriginal employees in the past year, 49.1% used recruiting methods other than the Aboriginal employment agencies, training institutions, or political bodies. Interviews with stakeholders within these Aboriginal organizations themselves indicated that there is a lack of awareness of their services to the general public.

8.1.2 Culture

An understanding of Aboriginal culture is also lacking among Saskatoon employers. Being able to understand Aboriginal needs, and translate these needs into human resource policy and practices is very difficult. One focus group participant expressed it in this way: “You have to understand what is important to the Aboriginal workforce. We typically layoff people in the wintertime and one Aboriginal employee mentioned that he may come back early if the fishing is not good”. We need to understand what their cultural demands and expectations are. Cultural awareness training, like that conducted for CUPE employees through their agreement with SAHO, is an excellent example of this need being addressed.

Our interview with SAHO indicated that, after giving the training to district staff, it is not uncommon to hear participants say that they wished they had known about these Aboriginal issues before. They begin to understand the differences, and this is the first step toward Aboriginal inclusion. SAHO’s Aboriginal employment tool kit can be distributed to all employers in all sectors and this should be communicated and made available to Saskatoon employers.

8.1.3 Skills and Training

Employers did express concern with the lack of training of the Aboriginal applicants. According to the literature review, the education level of the Aboriginals is not as high as non-Aboriginals. Education levels for certain segments of the Aboriginal population are still below the Canadian average. Only 31% of the Aboriginal on-reserve population has a high school education, which is about half the Canadian average.¹ However, this has improved, and the Aboriginal labour force is increasingly highly educated and skilled. In Canada in 1969, only 800 Aboriginal peoples had a post-secondary education, but by 1991 the number was 150,000. With more Aboriginal students staying in school, prospects are promising for increasing Aboriginal educational attainments.²

Comments in the survey indicate increasing educational attainment, in that many Saskatoon employers indicated they had a hard time retaining Aboriginal employees because they could get higher paying jobs elsewhere, usually in the public sector.

Employers also mentioned that the range of training of Aboriginal people is limited. Traditionally, training recruitment efforts focused on education, law, and social services. Employers in other sectors such as transportation and financial services indicated labour shortages in their sectors. Many had begun investigating foreign worker recruitment, though they were also interested in hiring and retaining Aboriginal employees. However,

¹ http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/awpi/fac_e.html

² Ibid.

due to the lack of trained Aboriginals in occupations that comprise their sectors, this was very difficult.

8.1.4 Misconceptions

The focus groups indicated problems still exist with Aboriginal stereotypes. An employer situated in a high Aboriginal population indicated that they did not have many Aboriginal employees. “If you watch them outside you can see their problems. Lots of time you see them drunk. Due to this, many employers are less inclined to want to hire Aboriginal people.” Comments in the survey indicate some misconceptions of the Aboriginal employee population based on a few employees in which they have had limited success. Furthermore, the lack of cultural awareness increases the likelihood of misunderstanding and exacerbates an employer’s misconceptions.

Success stories are not revealed to employers as much as the negative ones. More communication and promotion of success stories is required to overcome these misconceptions.

8.1.5 Recommended Strategies

8.1.5.1 Including Small and Medium Sized Businesses

Small and medium sized companies of Saskatoon have to be part of the solution. To date, the Corporate Circle has involved primarily large companies, training institutions and Aboriginal organizations. SREDA has proposed that the Corporate Circle be expanded to include small and medium sized companies who would share in the costs of obtaining resources.

8.1.5.2 Increased Awareness of Employment Services

Employment Agencies and Political Bodies need to create more awareness of their services. The Corporate Circle concept may promote this through information sharing and communication between training institutions, agencies and employers.

8.1.5.3 Promote Successes

There have been many successes of Aboriginal integration, but there is very little knowledge of these success stories among Saskatoon companies. This success is required to promote Aboriginal inclusion as well as best practices.

8.1.5.4 Increase Aboriginal Awareness of Industry Opportunities

The opportunities provided by different occupations need to be promoted to Aboriginals. Industry needs to communicate to Aboriginal training institutions their needs and translate this into promotion to Aboriginal high school students.

8.1.5.5 Cultural Awareness Training

Companies interested in implementing a representative workforce require training for the existing workforce on cultural awareness. There is a general lack of understanding on the importance and effectiveness of this training and where this training can be obtained. SREDA can play a major role in this area. Agreements reached between SAHO and CUPE in regards to compulsory cultural awareness training should be replicated with other union bodies.

8.1.5.6 Role Models

Large companies can play a role in hiring Aboriginal role models within their organization. These same individuals can play a major role in recruiting other Aboriginals. The success rate of Aboriginal retention is positively related to the percentage of the Aboriginals in the employer's workforce.

8.1.5.7 Support Systems

Companies that have had successful retention strategies have been able to develop support systems to enhance the success of Aboriginal retention. Examples include Aboriginal support networks, as well as making diversity management a part of a manager's performance appraisal.

As well, companies with the greatest success at Aboriginal employment and recruitment have provided the necessary job and training supports to do the job, in return for respecting their culture and giving the Aboriginals the control, as well as the accountability, to make sure they succeed at both filling the job and meeting the employer's job expectations.

8.1.5.8 Increase Industry Awareness of Strategies

The interviews and focus groups indicated a high need and interest by industry to learn more on how to successfully recruit and retain Aboriginals in order to address the labour shortages currently being experienced, and which are expected to worsen. SREDA can play a major role in obtaining and promoting such information to Saskatoon businesses.

8.2 Employee Attraction and Retention Strategy

This report has identified a number of challenges Saskatoon employers face in recruiting and retaining employees. The survey indicated that 60.2% of employers indicated they had difficulty recruiting at least one occupation. Furthermore, the average turnover rate of private employers in Saskatoon is 19%. The high cost of employee turnover is also a powerful incentive for employers. It is difficult to put an exact dollar figure on that cost, but available data indicates that the bill for replacing one worker ranges from one-half to 2 1/2 times the exiting employee's annual salary.³ The following strategy integrates the survey results, focus groups and personal interview data.

8.2.1 Influences on Employee Attraction and Retention

The impact on employee attraction and retention is derived primarily from 3 areas: 1) external influences, 2) an individual's characteristics, and 3) internal or organizational factors. The first two factors are considered in the following section, while the third factor is discussed in the section on recommended strategies.

8.2.1.1 External Influences

The external influences identified as influencing Saskatoon employers' ability to recruit and retain workers included the following:

8.2.1.1.1 Location

Location was indicated to be a concern, as well as an opportunity, in attracting employees to Saskatoon. Only 9.4% of employers in the survey indicated that location was a problem in recruiting employees. During the focus group, many indicated that Saskatoon's location was a benefit in that employers could promote lifestyle and safety benefits as part of their attraction and retention strategy. Saskatoon should be marketed as a safe place to raise your family in a clean environment.

One participant in the focus group indicated "Location is not a deterrent if we can foster sound business reasons to invest in Saskatchewan". The synchrotron is revealing this exact sentiment. "Already, there is evidence that the synchrotron is acting as a magnet for young researchers, many of whom had left Canada."⁴

³ <http://www.robmagazine.com/35-best/35best1.html>

⁴ *Maclean's*, January 21, 2002, p. 37.

8.2.1.1.2 Cost of Living

Some participants felt that the cost of living in Saskatchewan was higher than in Alberta, and that this hampers the ability of employers to recruit and retain workers. However, some participants in the focus group also indicated that there are taxes in Alberta, but they are hidden and not obvious to the taxpayer.

In contrast, some participants felt Saskatchewan had a lower cost of living than Alberta, and viewed this as an advantage for the province, as it would attract young people who can then have the ability to own their own house, and young families who can save for their children's university education.

8.2.1.1.3 Available Training Programs

Concerns were raised by a number of interviewees concerning the lack of training programs for certain occupations, particularly in the health sector. Even though a number of seats are designated for students who are expected to return to work, many do not.

8.2.1.1.4 Out-migration to Alberta

Some participants indicated that Alberta was a “problem” province, in that it poached many Saskatchewan graduates. The lower taxes and larger cities were a draw for many young post-secondary students.

8.2.1.1.5 Downturn in Information Technology

The downturn in the information technology created opportunities for employers in this sector. As one focus group participant indicated, “as an employer in this sector, it is a lot more comfortable today than a few years ago in terms of recruiting computer programmers”.

8.2.1.1.6 Fostering an Environment for Investment

The focus group participants indicated the need for creating an environment that fosters investment in this province, through such policies as lowering taxes and improving our health care system. It was felt that by doing so, other ventures related to the synchrotron would be more inclined to locate in Saskatoon, thereby creating more opportunities to attract employees to our city. By creating these types of jobs, it becomes easier to attract families to Saskatoon if opportunities are available for the entire family.

8.2.1.2 Internal Influences

The individual influences identified as influencing Saskatoon employers' ability to recruit and retain workers included the following:

8.2.1.2.1 Employee demographics

Saskatoon has a fairly young workforce, with 61% of the workforce under the age of 44. However, the overall population demographics are one of an aging population but with a young and growing Aboriginal component.

8.2.1.2.2 Personal needs and preferences

It was indicated by participants in the focus groups as well as during personal interviews that the younger employees place a different relative value on work and non-work activities. As one personal interviewee indicated, “the younger employee believe people should chill out and cheer up”. They tend to place a greater emphasis on life rather than work, and like to set their own hours rather than the standard 9 to 5.

Younger workers are also more interested in organizations that offer challenging work and a learning environment, in contrast to the old, paternalistic management organizations. Unlike the old-school organization, the companies that attract younger workers are ones that operate on a partnership basis. In return for their time, skills and talent, employees are looking for employers who offer everything from rewards and recognition to workplaces that encourage a balance between work and personal life and community involvement.

Young workers are also seeking personal development. This group of workers expects to be encouraged to take risks, make decisions and be respected. A detailed career plan also encourages employees to stay with the employer. In some unique cases, groups of employers have formed alliances to enable rotation of the employee in both their organization and in other organizations. If it is understood that an employee will eventually leave, it benefits all employers to form alliances to offer new challenges.

8.2.1.2.3 Spousal Recruitment

Due to the rise in dual income couples, spousal recruitment has increased in importance. Recruiting people to move to Saskatoon requires having the ability to find a job for the spouse also. Participants in the focus group and the personal interviews indicated that being able to find jobs for the spouse had a large bearing on whether the applicant accepted the position.

8.2.1.2.4 Finding a Spouse

The young people, soon after finishing university, seem to be preoccupied with not only finding a job, but also with finding a spouse! During the focus group, an employer in the information technology sector indicated that she regularly gets on the telephone with other computer programmers she knows in other cities and tries to entice them to come back. Frequently, this is brought up as a concern. She indicated that she basically has a date matching service as well as a computer business!

8.2.1.2.5 Compensation Expectations

According to the focus group participants, employers in Saskatoon frequently do not have the same compensation expectations as those of young workers. Employers in Saskatchewan frequently do not pay what these young workers are worth or what they can receive in other jurisdictions.

8.2.2 Recommended Strategies

8.2.2.1 Market your Organization

Companies that sell products or services know the importance of marketing. It is essential to identify your customer, carve out a niche in the marketplace, and manage your reputation if your product is going to be successful. Marketing your company to prospective employees is no different. In the war for talent, you may be just one of several options in a candidate's mind. Anything you can do to boost your reputation prior to the "sale" will give you a competitive advantage.

8.2.2.2 Recognize the value of your workforce

The younger workers (and older workers as well) require fair compensation, challenging work, the ability to make decisions, take risks, be respected, and have a career plan. The young workforce has the advantage of a tighter labour market. The result is that employees are more demanding and independent, as well as being less willing to sacrifice lifestyle for a pay cheque. Organizational initiatives need to reflect this. Potential strategies that reflect both the needs of the workforce as well as promote long tenure include the following:

- Competitive remuneration levels
- Flexible remuneration packaging
- Study assistance
- Flexible working hours
- Career counseling or planning
- Rotation into different roles
- Employee share plans
- Improved working conditions
- Long-term incentive plans
- Counter-offering an employment offer
- Deferred incentive payments
- Secondments
- Job redesign
- Leave without pay or sabbaticals
- Conference opportunities

- Choice of assignments

By implementing some of the above strategies, it was felt by the interviewees and the focus group participants that we can retain our experienced workers and our younger workforce. Recruiting the young workers right after their educational training and keeping them employed in a favorable work environment for at least 4-5 years will help bridge them to a stage in their life in which they are ready to settle down and raise a family, most likely in Saskatoon.

8.2.2.3 Promote Successes

The participants indicated that Saskatchewan does not promote success. The recent “Only in Saskatchewan” initiative by Economic and Cooperative Development was seen as a positive example of Saskatchewan promoting both young people and success in Saskatchewan.

We have to stop thinking “we can’t be as good as other provinces.” We have to quit undervaluing ourselves.

How many people know that Saskatchewan and Saskatoon took a bold lead in attracting the Synchrotron, or that we won location of the facility over Ontario because we raised more money than the Government of Ontario? How many people know that the facility will host up to 2,000 visiting scientists and graduate students a year and that the Canadian Light Source is Canada’s largest science project in more than 30 years, or that industries all over Canada will pay up to \$40,000 per day to have access to the beamline.⁵

We need to be proud of our accomplishments, and by promoting our successes people will be more inclined to be a part of a growing and thriving city.

8.3 Foreign and Immigrant Worker Strategy

This report has identified a number of labour shortages Saskatoon employers are facing in the local labour market, particularly the trades and health care sector. Employers in these sectors indicated they have a difficult time recruiting employees to fill their positions due to a lack of experienced, skilled and available labour.

The survey indicated that 9.3% of Saskatoon employers attempted to hire a foreign or immigrant worker. The survey also indicated that only a small percentage of employers were aware of the Foreign Worker Program or the Provincial Nominee program, at 12.3% and 8.8% respectively. In contrast, 49% of employers were aware of the

⁵ Maclean’s, 21 January 2002, p. 36.

Saskatoon Open Door Society and the University of Saskatchewan International Student Association, which focus on immigrant workers.

In terms of recruiting participants of the focus group, there was not as much interest as for the Aboriginal integration strategy. In personal interviews with health care and Aboriginal stakeholders, many indicated concerns with foreign worker recruitment. Concerns were expressed from two standpoints, the first being a concern about differing occupational standards, and the second a concern relating to ethical reasons.

The ethical concerns were primarily the idea of recruiting labour from countries with a worse labour shortage than Canada, particularly in health care recruiting. The other ethical concern is in relation to pursuing foreign workers instead of training our “own” Saskatchewan people. As an example, interest in the RN program last year included 700 applicants of which only 260 seats were available. Given the large number of Aboriginal people in Saskatchewan, it was seen that these monies should be spent on further educating this underrepresented group.

Given that only 9.3% of all survey respondents had attempted to hire foreign or immigrant workers, the number of companies available for the focus group was limited. However, of the participants in the focus group, a number of issues were raised as to what could be done for businesses interested in foreign and immigrant worker recruitment.

8.3.1 Difficulties in Recruiting Foreign and Immigrant Workers

8.3.1.1 Interview Process

The participants indicated that the interview process is very challenging. For foreign workers, the main difficulty is the geographical separation. Employers prefer face-to-face interviewing, yet this is obviously difficult to undertake when recruiting someone in another country. For both foreign and immigrant workers, employers often face the difficulty of language barriers in the interviewing process.

8.3.1.2 Training Standards

Another issue of concern the participants raised was the differing standards of training for certain occupations, particularly in health care. The example given was in relation to the skill and training level of nurses from the Philippines as compared to nurses trained in Canada.

8.3.1.3 Delays

Participants indicated that significant paperwork and time delays slow down the recruiting process of foreign workers. One of the participants indicated they had considerable problems and delays in recruiting foreign workers to fill their job vacancies.

8.3.1.4 Cultural Differences

One of the participants indicated that a common problem with immigrant and foreign workers is frequently experienced in relation to their approach to work. As one participant indicated, they had to “de-communize” the immigrant worker so he would do work that was not explicitly directed of him to do.

8.3.2 Recommended Strategies

Although all these challenges are difficult to overcome, the following strategies were suggested to at least minimize some of the challenges.

8.3.2.1 One-Stop Shopping

In order to minimize the confusion between programs and which occupations are covered, participants indicated the need to have a one-stop shopping portal for applications to use the government program, as well as a list of current applicants and their qualifications interested in working in Canada. There is a need for a foreign and immigrant worker service bureau; a single point of contact where employers can go to get all the answers to their questions.

8.3.2.2 Marketing of Programs

The participants of the focus group had all heard of the Open Door Society and the International Students Association. They had indicated that the Open Door Society had called them informing them of immigrant workers seeking work in Canada.

The participants all had success in hiring immigrant workers, and, in fact, found many to be hard working individuals, and would be interested in hiring more immigrant workers. However, they did not know of the government programs, and indicated they should be marketed to employers indicating services and occupations covered.

8.3.2.3 Success Stories

As part of the marketing programs, success stories should be shared, indicating supports used and the environment necessary for successful integration, such as overcoming language barriers, and cultural awareness required for the rest of the staff. These success stories may overcome some of the ethical concerns regarding “importing” talent.